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IMPACT OF BRAIN DRAIN AND JAPA SYNDROME ON ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This review seeks to highlight the impacts of brain drain on academic staff retention and teaching quality in Nigerian public universities, as well as the emerging phenomenon of 'Japa Syndrome'. The study focuses on secondary data with Journals, Books and Theses as review. The skilled flow of professionals, especially academics, to more developed countries for improved prospects and living conditions, poses significant consequences for Nigeria's education system. This analysis highlights that this migration was driven by multiple factors, including insufficient infrastructure, poor working conditions, political instability, and economic issues, all of which point to the need for reform of the system. The loss of academic staff from the classroom further adds to the issues already facing the academic environment, including overcrowded classrooms and higher loads for those who remain, resulting in a significant drop in educational outcomes. Moreover, the review identifies the lack of empirical studies on brain drain, specific brain drain retention issues, and the deterioration of teaching quality, suggesting the need to conduct more studies on these dynamics. Implementing comprehensive strategies that improve working conditions in the workplace, increase faculty remuneration, and provide opportunities for professional growth are crucial to addressing brain drain and the Japa Syndrome. The suggested that continuous policy shifts aimed at securing the academic environment are critical. The review indicates a success-driven approach, emphasizing that serious interventions are necessary to prevent the ongoing loss of academic talent, which could otherwise perpetuate low-quality education in Nigeria's public universities and have far-reaching implications for national development.

Keywords: Brain drain, Japasyndrome, Academic staff, Retention, Quality of teaching and Nigerian public universities

Introduction

All universities around the world play an important role in sustainable development as places of knowledge production, innovation, and societal progress. Although Nigerian universities have achieved significant successes, there are significant challenges that threaten the country's educational strength. A major challenge is to retain trained academic staff in the country, which is being challenged by brain drain experienced by the country as it loses skilled workers to more developed countries due to better living and working conditions and the Japa Syndrome – a term used colloquially to describe the large-scale movement of young Nigerians, academics included, to other nations for better opportunities in their lives (Salau et al., 2020). The linkage between brain drain and the Japa syndrome affects academic staff retention in Nigerian universities and jeopardizes the quality of teaching and the universities' ability to perform well in achieving sustainable development and social advancement.

Nigerian public universities are often plagued by outdated infrastructure, with overcrowded classrooms lacking sufficient furniture and shared offices with limited ventilation and comfort. Poor working conditions are leading to job dissatisfaction, and talented lecturers and professors are looking for better places to work. This imbalance between the number of students and teachers makes it harder to provide quality education and to enhance teachers' morale. In addition to infrastructural issues, other challenges, such as inconsistent power supply, promotion policies, and funding, create additional difficulties in academic life, leading to high staff

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turnover and brain drain (Salau et al., 2020). The review highlights the impact of poor infrastructure and working conditions on academic staff job satisfaction in Nigerian public universities, with the potential for brain drain and a retention problem that negatively affects the quality of education and the overall teaching and learning environment.

It is not just academia that suffers from Nigeria's Brain drain; other critical areas, such as health care service delivery units, have experienced mass migration of professionals, which strains the health system's performance. Research indicates that low wages, lack of productivity bonuses, dissatisfaction with jobs, and unstable jobs are all reasons skilled professionals leave for jobs overseas. This is a vicious circle in which service quality suffers when staffing is lacking, leading to lower staff retention and greater migration (Akinwale & George, 2022; Samuel & Haruna, 2025). For instance, the migration of Nigerian nurses to the United Kingdom and other countries has been driven by factors such as limited social welfare provisions, sociopolitical instability, and dissatisfaction in the nursing profession in Nigeria, which has negatively impacted healthcare quality (Samuel & Haruna, 2025). The review shows that poor working conditions, job dissatisfaction and brain drain in the different sectors of the economy, including the health care sector and the decline in service quality have a negative impact as it stifles the retention of skilled workers, a situation that can be found in the Nigerian academia, where the situation looks similar, with the same challenges.

Brain drain in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, driven by economic and political factors, weak public service provision, ethnic divisions, and corruption. Political issues like dysfunctional democracy and the ongoing preservation of the elite at the expense of citizens' welfare create an environment in which talented individuals feel forced to emigrate for security, opportunities, and protection of their rights. Political and socio-structural issues are important ‘push-factors' that drive academics and other highly qualified professionals to move (Chioke et al., 2026). The review clarifies that the complex causes of brain drain in Nigeria, such as economic and political instability, create an unfriendly environment that encourages skilled personnel to migrate, negatively impacting the retention of academic staff and the teaching quality of public universities in Nigeria. There is a formidable sociopolitical opposition to the retention of academics in Nigeria. The general argument that brain drain cannot be solved by restricting the movement of medical doctors has been widely shared by citizens and has thus far proven difficult to find much support from the legislature. Some concerns include possible human rights violations, unemployment, and the political elites' unwillingness to address underlying systemic problems (Ajoseh et al., 2024). This review reinforces public concern about the human rights issues arising from legislation aimed at retaining medical doctors in Nigeria, the inability of these policies to address the basic systemic problems driving brain drain, and the brain drain of academic staff and the decline in quality teaching in Nigerian public universities.

Brain drain, in the global context, is recognized as a problem that extends beyond the economy to encompass social, institutional, and governance elements. Research in other developing nations (e.g., Iraq and South Africa) highlights the need for integrated frameworks that incorporate social equity, governance reform, and sustainable development objectives to ensure effective talent loss mitigation. In this regard, the benefits of retaining students' talents depend on solutions to workplace satisfaction, career development opportunities, equitable compensation, and employee motivation, which serve as the basis for implementing academic staff retention (Al-Jaberi et al., 2025; Musakuro, 2022). This review shows that brain drain is not just an economic problem; it is also a social and governance problem, as strategies to ensure brain retention, which are strategies that make the workplace more satisfying and provide better career opportunities, are important strategies that need to be adopted in the context of academic staff retention and better teaching quality in Nigerian public universities.

In the higher education sector, talent management systems have placed an emphasis on the importance of strategic human resource practices like workforce planning, recruitment, compensation, performance management, professional development, succession planning, and more to create an environment that attracts and retains high-quality faculty, thereby improving teaching and learning (Musakuro, 2022). From the review, it is concluded that adopting these strategic HR measures in Nigeria's public universities is important for establishing a conducive environment to attract high-calibre academic staff, improve instructional quality and

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research output, and reduce the effects of brain drain. Also, although e-learning offers great potential for changing pedagogies, there are financial constraints, insufficient ICT infrastructure, inadequate training, and content-readiness problems in Nigerian universities that hamper the effective implementation of innovative pedagogies (Nwagwu, 2019). Thus, not fully exploiting technological solutions such as e-learning adds to the problems of academic quality and staff retention in the face of the brain drain and JAPA syndrome.

The review identifies some under-researched areas related to the relationship between “brain drain” and “japa syndrome” and academic staff retention and teaching quality in Nigerian public Universities. First, the understanding of the ‘japa syndrome' and its impact on university staffing, staff morale, and teaching effectiveness, generally conceptualised and nderstood at a socio-economic level, is limited in its scope of application to specific situations and is conceptually and empirically underdeveloped (Ikpi& Williams, 2026). Secondly, empirical evidence directly linking brain drain to tangible retention issues and deteriorating teaching quality in public universities in Nigeria is limited, and much of the literature focuses on the general migration phenomenon rather than teaching quality indicators (Salau et al., 2020). Thirdly, although international studies indicate that the quality of a university can reduce the tendency of talent mobility (Ciriaci, 2013), similar studies of how Nigerian universities' quality factors relate to brain drain and Japa are few. Thirdly, insufficient empirical studies have been conducted to provide a detailed account of the relationship between variables in the work environment and staff turnover and brain drain, leading to inadequate retention strategies designed for Nigerian contexts (Salau et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2001). Fifthly, the pedagogical implications of staff shortage and staff turnover, which are beyond the general international discussion on teacher effectiveness (Tobon& Lozano-Salmorán, 2024), have not been explored in the context of brain drain and Japa in Nigeria. Sixthly, there is a lack of migrant-related, university-level, comparable global frameworks for holistic talent management to address retention issues in universities in Nigeria (Musakuro, 2022). Lastly, socio-emotional and cultural motivators, such as religious motivations for migration intentions, warrant further qualitative study beyond economic explanations (Ikpi& Williams, 2026).

Lastly, there is sparse evidence on public and stakeholder perceptions of policies aimed at curbing brain drain, and on the impact of such policies on retention and teaching quality in Nigeria's universities (Ajoseh et al., 2024). Based on the above gaps, the study is set to review the effect of brain drain and japa syndrome on academic staff retention and academic quality of teaching in public universities in Nigeria, with special focus on the extent to which the emigration of academic staff due to brain drain and japa syndrome has affected the quality of academic teaching and delivery in public universities in Nigeria.

Review of the Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Concept of Brain Drain and Japa Syndrome

Brain drain refers to the emigration of educated and skilled professionals from their home country to foreign nations in pursuit of better employment opportunities, remuneration, and living conditions. This phenomenon has profound implications for developing countries, including Nigeria, where it exacerbates human capital shortages in critical sectors such as education and healthcare. Research indicates that brain drain results from push factors such as poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, political instability, and limited career development opportunities, coupled with pull factors like better salaries, advanced infrastructure, and political stability abroad (Akinwale & George, 2022; Chioke et al., 2026). The healthcare sector in Nigeria, for instance, exemplifies the detrimental impact of brain drain where poor quality of work life and job dissatisfaction significantly precipitate the mass exodus of medical personnel, thereby undermining service delivery (Akinwale & George, 2022).

Japa Syndrome, a socio-cultural contemporaneous term in Nigeria, encapsulates the desire for permanent migration among youths and professionals, driven by dissatisfaction with local socio-economic and political conditions. Unlike traditional brain drain, which often is framed in strictly economic terms, Japa Syndrome reflects broader psychosocial and aspirational dimensions of migration intentions. This mindset is intensified by perceptions of insecurity, lack of opportunities, and systemic failures in governance. The syndrome is intertwined with generational perspectives on globalization and identity, contributing to significant "talent

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flight" from Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially among younger academic staff who view migration as a means of self-actualization and security (Chioke et al., 2026).

Academic Staff Retention and Quality of Teaching

Academic staff retention refers to the capacity of higher education institutions to sustain their teaching and research workforce over time, minimizing turnover and brain drain. Retention encompasses not only measurable tenure but also factors that influence the quality, motivation, and productivity of academic personnel. In Nigerian public universities, retention challenges are compounded by infrastructural decay, insufficient funding, administrative inefficiencies, and disparities in promotion practices (Salau et al., 2020). These institutional deficiencies foster environments that precipitate attrition, further aggravated by socio-political instability and the appeal of more supportive professional contexts overseas. Strategies to enhance retention focus on creating enabling environments through adequate funding, policy reforms, motivational incentives, and infrastructural improvements (Salau et al., 2020).

Quality of teaching in higher education embodies several dimensions: content mastery, pedagogical competence, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement. It reflects the ability of academic staff to deliver curricula that foster learning, critical thinking, and professional competence. The quality of teaching is affected by factors such as staff qualifications, infrastructure, workload, and institutional support. Brain drain and diminished staff morale adversely affect teaching quality due to loss of experienced lecturers and increased workload on remaining staff, often resulting in diminished academic standards and student outcomes (Adejare et al., 2020; Akinwale & George, 2022). Non-academic staff inefficiency also indirectly influences teaching quality by affecting the administrative and operational environment (Adejare et al., 2020).

Related Theory

Several theoretical frameworks inform the understanding of brain drain, migration, and retention issues in Nigerian academia. Notably, the Push-Pull theory offers insight into migration dynamics by categorizing factors influencing migration into "push" forces (adverse conditions in home country) and "pull" forces (attractive features of destination countries) (Al-Jabieri et al., 2025). Political theories such as the Cancerous Democracy Theory (CDT) explain how governance deficiencies and political instability serve as critical push factors driving brain drain (Chioke et al., 2026).

Human Capital Theory emphasizes the value and mobility of skills and knowledge, explicating how investment in education may paradoxically lead to increased emigration when local conditions fail to reward such capital adequately (Chioke et al., 2026; Vega-Muñoz et al., 2025). Together, these theories provide a multidimensional understanding of academic staff migration and retention. The interplay of theoretical frameworks, including the Push-Pull theory, Cancerous Democracy Theory, and Human Capital Theory, elucidates the complex dynamics of brain drain and migration within Nigerian academia, particularly in relation to the retention of academic staff and the overall quality of education amid the challenges posed by adverse local conditions.

Brain Drain and Academic Staff Retention in Nigerian Public Universities

Brain drain constitutes one of the most pressing threats to academic staff retention in Nigerian public universities. Empirical evidence highlights that inadequate remuneration, absence of career progression opportunities, poor work environment, and political instability incentivize academic staff to seek employment abroad (Salau et al., 2020). The deteriorating infrastructure and overpopulation in classrooms intensify dissatisfaction, contributing to attrition rates among highly qualified lecturers and professors (Salau et al., 2020). The loss of skilled staff has detrimental effects on institutional knowledge continuity and academic program sustainability, impeding universities' ability to deliver quality education and foster research excellence.

Brain drain significantly threatens the retention of academic staff in Nigerian public universities, as skilled faculty members leave for better opportunities abroad. Key factors driving this trend include unfavorable working conditions, inadequate remuneration, limited career advancement, and political instability. Research

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indicates that low compensation is a primary reason for faculty dissatisfaction, as many qualified lecturers feel undervalued relative to their roles (Akpotu Of Of et al., 2025). This financial discontent is worsened by deteriorating infrastructure and rising student numbers, leading to overcrowded classrooms that place additional strain on remaining faculty, further diminishing their ability to provide quality instruction and mentorship (Salau et al., 2020).

Political unrest within universities exacerbates these retention issues, fostering insecurity and tension that contribute to faculty departures. Cultism and political interference have been identified as significant threats to campus stability and academic activities, prompting faculty to seek safer environments (Isaiah Omodan, 2020). The loss of experienced staff disrupts knowledge continuity and undermines academic program sustainability, diminishing curriculum standards, instructional quality, and research excellence critical for maintaining competitiveness and national development (Abayomi Awe, 2020). Without strategic interventions to enhance workplace conditions, career progression, and security, these attrition patterns jeopardize the long-term viability and reputation of Nigerian public universities, as systemic issues related to remuneration, infrastructure, and political stability compel academics to leave (Abayomi Awe, 2020; Akpotu Of Of et al., 2025; Isaiah Omodan, 2020; Salau et al., 2020).

Brain Drain and Quality of Teaching in Nigerian Public Universities

The exodus of academic staff through brain drain directly correlates with declines in the quality of teaching within Nigerian public universities. As experienced and competent educators leave, the workload on remaining faculty increases, often disproportionately affecting junior and contract lecturers who may lack adequate mentorship and resources. This staffing imbalance results in diminished instructional quality, less personalized student engagement, and compromised curriculum delivery (Akinwale & George, 2022). Moreover, the erosion of competitive academic environments undermines scholarly innovation, leading to reduced student performance and institutional reputation.

The brain drain phenomenon in Nigerian public universities significantly undermines teaching quality by creating staffing imbalances and overburdening the remaining academic workforce, thereby diminishing instructional effectiveness and student outcomes (Shaibu et al, 2024). The loss of experienced faculty increases the teaching workload for junior and contract lecturers, who often lack adequate mentorship and resources (Akinwale & George, 2022). This scenario is exacerbated by infrastructural decay, inadequate resources, and rising student-to-staff ratios, which lead to low morale and contribute to turnover (Salau et al., 2020). The cyclical deterioration of working conditions continues to erode the quality of education, emphasizing the necessity for improved physical infrastructure and human resources to address the challenges posed by faculty exodus (Asiyai, 2020).

Furthermore, limited technological adoption among faculty members hampers instructional quality, with variations in academic status influencing technology integration (Agbatogun, 2013). The depletion of experienced staff who could advocate for educational innovations exacerbates this issue, while the need for high-quality pedagogy and development programs becomes critical to counteract brain drain's negative effects (Patfield et al., 2022). Institutional performance models indicate a positive correlation between total quality management (TQM) approaches and university performance, as retaining talent is vital for sustained quality improvement (Aliyu et al., 2018). Ultimately, the decline in competitive scholarly environments due to brain drain stifles academic innovation and collaborative research, essential elements for enhancing institutional reputation and student success.

Japa Syndrome and Academic Staff Retention in Nigerian Public Universities

Japa Syndrome, embodying the current migration aspirations among Nigerian academic staff, has emerged as a cultural phenomenon that exacerbates retention challenges. It reflects a proactive and, at times, immediate pursuit of migration often without adequate engagement with institutional policies or support structures. The syndrome is characterized by the rapid loss of younger lecturers and researchers who are dissatisfied with professional stagnation, insecurity, and societal challenges (Chioke et al., 2026). This trend accelerates gaps in

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manpower and disrupts continuity in academic programs, necessitating targeted interventions to address aspirations and retain talent.

Japa Syndrome illustrates the urgent migration desire among Nigerian academic staff, presenting a significant retention challenge in public universities. This phenomenon is largely driven by dissatisfaction with career progression, job insecurity, and socio-economic instability, leading to the swift departure of primarily younger lecturers and researchers. Consequently, these departures create critical manpower shortages and disrupt academic continuity, highlighting the need for specific retention strategies (Chioke et al., 2026). The root causes include chronic underfunding that results in deteriorating infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a demotivating work environment, which particularly affect younger faculty facing limited promotion prospects and inadequate support (Salau et al., 2020). Additionally, systemic workload imbalances due to colleagues leaving further jeopardize instructional quality, eroding job satisfaction and perpetuating a cycle that drives more staff toward emigration or disengagement (Abayomi Awe, 2020).

Addressing the Japa Syndrome necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes enhanced funding, improved infrastructure, and strategic talent management frameworks that promote transparent promotion pathways and mentorship, drawing from successful models in South Africa (Musakuro, 2022; Theron et al., 2014). Effective leadership and stress management are also crucial, as demonstrated in Jordanian universities, where supportive management and clear career development significantly reduce turnover intentions (Mahmoud, 2025). Moreover, misaligned academic policies and a lack of recognition for contributions exacerbate professional grievances, fueling the desire for migration (Salau et al., 2020). Historical context reveals that rapid expansion of state-owned institutions without adequate resources has contributed to current challenges, coupled with socioeconomic issues that intensify migration aspirations (Abayomi Awe, 2020; Chioke et al., 2026). Ultimately, addressing these multifaceted retention challenges is essential for maintaining the quality and competitiveness of Nigerian higher education (Abayomi Awe, 2020; Mahmoud, 2025; Musakuro, 2022; Salau et al., 2020; Theron et al., 2014).

Japa Syndrome and Quality of Teaching in Nigerian Public Universities

The implications of Japa Syndrome extend beyond retention, significantly affecting the quality of teaching. The enthusiasm and potential of youthful academics who are key drivers of pedagogical innovation and curriculum renewal are curtailed by their emigration intentions. The depletion of this demographic inhibits knowledge transfer, mentorship, and research leadership essential for high-quality education delivery (Salau et al., 2020). Additionally, the prevailing uncertainty may create an environment of low morale, adversely affecting educational outcomes and student experience.

Japa Syndrome reflects the growing migration aspirations among Nigerian academic staff, severely impacting teaching quality in public universities by undermining the contributions of young academics crucial for pedagogical innovation and knowledge transfer. As these younger faculty members depart, mentorship opportunities dwindle, disrupting curriculum renewal and ultimately compromising student learning outcomes (Salau et al., 2020). Their absence stifles the adoption of innovative teaching methods that cater to evolving academic needs and market demands, weakening instructional practices that encourage critical thinking and self-efficacy (Sasson & Tifferet, 2024). Moreover, a reduction in young and dynamic faculty diminishes the modeling of essential pedagogical competencies, potentially lowering overall instructional effectiveness (Kunter et al., 2013).

The loss of young academics also degrades mentorship and research leadership within departments, inhibiting professional development cycles that are vital for educational quality (Abayomi Awe, 2020). This brain drain stifles scholarly activities necessary for maintaining curriculum relevance and institutional prestige, ultimately leading to stagnant curricula and a decline in academic vibrancy. Current job uncertainty and poor institutional conditions further demoralize remaining staff, exacerbating emigration intentions (Abayomi Awe, 2020). To address these challenges, measures should focus on strengthening career development and institutional support for young academics, enhancing leadership emphasis on professional growth, investing in infrastructure, and

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promoting evidence-based teaching practices (Yalçın et al., 2025; Sasson & Tifferet, 2024). These changes are critical for retaining talent vital to improving teaching quality in Nigerian universities.

In synthesis, the reviewed literature underscores that brain drain and Japa Syndrome are deeply interconnected phenomena contributing to academic staff attrition and compromised teaching quality in Nigerian public universities. Effective retention strategies require holistic approaches addressing not only remuneration and infrastructure but also systemic governance, political stability, and socio-cultural factors influencing migration aspirations. This integrated understanding is critical for policy formulation and academic planning aimed at sustaining Nigeria's higher education quality and workforce stability.

Conclusion

The review states that brain drain and "Japa Syndrome" have a significant impact on the retention of academic staff in Nigerian public universities and on the quality of education delivered. The consequences of the continued emigration of skilled hands, especially academics, in pursuit of better opportunities and higher living standards, are dire for Nigeria's education sector. From insufficient infrastructure to poor working conditions, political instability to economic difficulties, the many factors driving this migration highlight the need for systemic reform and intervention. Academic staff who have immigrated have further compounded classroom crowding, poor school facilities, and staff workload, all of which play a significant role in reducing educational outcomes. The analysis shows that there is insufficient empirical evidence directly linking brain drain to retention problems and the deterioration of teaching quality, which requires further research and a more insightful understanding of these dynamics.

Suggestions

Based on the above conclusion, the following suggestions are made:

1. Nigerian public universities' management ought to construct their physical infrastructure and working conditions for their academic staff. This involves improving classroom infrastructure, equipping classrooms with essential teaching aids, and ensuring a reliable power supply, thereby creating a conducive learning environment for effective teaching and learning.
2. Universities should conduct a review and improvement of faculty remuneration packages to make them internationally competitive to retain skilled faculty members. This can encompass providing improved salary, benefits, productivity incentives, and career advancement that show and reward the contributions of academic staff.
2. There is a need to make systemic policy changes in an effort to stabilize the academic environment. This involves engaging stakeholders to design policies that address the root causes of brain drain, improve job security, and foster a culture of academic freedom and integrity, creating a more conducive environment for faculty.

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